As palmeiras [The palms] (2018)
by Eric Banks
North American premiere

Friday | 8 April 2022 | 7 & 830pm
Queen Anne Christian Church
1316 3rd Avenue West | Seattle

Saturday | 9 April 2022 | 3pm
St John’s Episcopal Church
114 20th Avenue Southeast | Olympia

THE ESOTERICs

Eric Banks
Founding director

Aaron Moore

Allison Fortenberry

Alexandra King

Amy Korver

Brittni Liyanage

Daniel Powers *

Ethan Shutt

Jade Hersch

Jennifer Hrachovec *

Jonathan You *

Julia Jay

Leigh McGill *

Livia Lennington *

Logan Cox

Mitchell Baier *

Olivia Sutherland *

Shawna Avinger *

Stephen Elliott

Tristain Holmes

Will Dean

* denotes soloists

Special thanks to:
Sarah Lewontin | Supertitlist     Garrett Lennington | Technical Producer
Matthew Bonner, Christine Dove, Joe Scott | Box Office Coordinators
**The Esoterics**

Now on the cusp of its 30th concert season, Seattle’s most innovative chorus has drawn local, national, and international praise for performing rarely-heard compositions of contemporary music for unaccompanied voices, for infusing elements of the literary, theatrical, and visual arts into the typical concert experience, and for inspiring and performing new *a cappella* choral settings of poetry, philosophy, and spiritual writings by composers around the world. In early 1992, Eric Banks brought together a group of friends to perform his Master’s and Doctoral recitals in Choral Studies at the University of Washington. After Banks’ recitals were completed, the group wanted to keep singing together, so Banks chose a name for his ensemble based on the Greek adjective εσοτερικός – which describes a close-knit community and the secret knowledge that its members share. Since incorporating with this name in 1993, The Esoterics has performed hundreds of concerts throughout the Pacific Northwest, has commissioned and premiered hundreds of new works for *a cappella* voices in myriad languages, and has mastered many of the most virtuosic choral works of the last century in concerts described as “compelling,” “crafted,” “luxuriant,” “lyrical,” “sumptuous,” and “superb.” The Esoterics has released twenty-one CD recordings on its own label (Terpsichore) and has been honored to compete at the 2000 Cork International Choral Festival (Ireland), the 2001 Certamen Coral de Tolosa (Spain), and the 2006 Harald Andersén International Choir Competition in Helsinki (Finland). As well, The Esoterics has demonstrated its continuing commitment to choral education in becoming the only choral ensemble in Washington State that grants continuing-education credit to its members who also teach in the public schools. In recognition for its efforts in choral education and innovation, The Esoterics has been honored five times with the ASCAP and Chorus America Award for the Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music (in 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008, and 2017). The Esoterics has been honored to receive grants from the arts commissions of Washington State, King County, and the City of Seattle, as well as funding from Amazon, Google, Microsoft, the Seattle Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, the BMI Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Esoterics is a proud member chorus of ACDA (the American Choral Directors Association), Chorus America, IFCM (the International Federation for Choral Music), and GALA (the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses).

**Mission Statement**

The Esoterics is a Seattle-based vocal ensemble that is dedicated to performing and perpetuating contemporary *a cappella* choral settings of poetry, philosophy, and spiritual writings from around the world.

While cultivating artistic expression and cultural understanding among its singers and audience alike,

The Esoterics aspires to reflect the beauty, power, and significance that are inherent in the music of our time.

**Eric Banks**

As a conductor, composer, clinician, vocalist, linguist, and ethnomusicologist, Eric Banks has garnered significant acclaim as one of the most creative and compelling choral directors in the United States for his unwavering commitment to new music for unaccompanied voices. In 1992, Eric founded The Esoterics, a professional-caliber chamber chorus in Seattle whose mission is to perform and perpetuate contemporary choral music beyond the scope of the established *a cappella* canon. After completing his BA in Composition at Yale University in 1990, Eric relocated to Seattle to study in the departments of Choral Studies and Music Theory at the University of Washington. His MM thesis (1992) is a performance edition of *Dixit Dominus* by Chiara Margarita Cozzolani; his MA thesis (1995) is a postmodern analysis of Arvo Pärt’s *Credo*; and his DMA dissertation (1996) surveys the choral music of Mexican composer and Aztec ethnomusicologist Carlos Chávez. In 1997, at the conclusion of his graduate study, Banks traveled to Sweden as a Fulbright Scholar and Lois Roth Fellow in order to learn more about its contemporary choral culture. While in Stockholm, Eric performed with several ensembles, including the Swedish Radio Choir and the Eric Ericson Chamber Choir. In his music, Eric is drawn to ideas that are *esoteric* in origin, and chooses to express concepts that are undiscovered, under-represented, or not easily decipherable to a wider audience. As a composer, Banks has been able to combine his love of poetry, foreign language, classical civilization, social justice, comparative religion, and the natural sciences to create a growing repertoire of new works for *a cappella* chorus. Several of Banks’ commissioned works have been recorded by The Esoterics, and can be found on CDs released on the Terpsichore label. Eric was a visiting scholar at the Royal Conservatory of Music and Swedish National Radio in Stockholm, as well as at the Cama Oriental Institute in Mumbai, India. Winner of the 2010 Dale Warland Singers Commission Award from Chorus America and the American Composers Forum, Eric has received composition and research grants from 4Culture, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Artist Trust, the Atwood Foundation, New Music USA, the San Francisco Arts Commission, Seattle CityArtists, the Washington State Arts Commission, and three “creativity” grants the National Endowment for the Arts. His upcoming premieres include pieces for Ember in New York City, Mikrokosmos in Paris, and the San Francisco Girls Chorus. Eric lives in Seattle with David Gellman, his husband of 25 years (who is also The Esoterics’ graphic design guru). You can read more about Eric’s work on his own webpage: www.ericbanks.com. Eric is a member of ASCAP.
1. SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES [121° 28’ W]

from *On the road* (1957)
by Jack Kerouac
(American author, 1922-1969)

“I suddenly realized I was in California.
Warm, palmy air – air you can kiss – and palms.”

2. MEXICO CITY, MEXICO [99° 08’ W]

*Una palmera* (A palm tree, 1952)
by Rosario Castellanos
(Mexican poet, 1925-1974)

Señora de los vientos,
garza de la llanura,
cuando te meces canta
tu cintura.

Gesto de la oración
o preludio del vuelo,
en tu copa se vierten uno a uno
los cielos.

Desde el país oscuro de los hombres
he venido, a mirarte, de rodillas.
Alta, desnuda, única.

Poesía.

seníora de los β’entos,
garsa de la ḟ’anura,
kwando te meses canta
tu cintura.

xesto de la oras’on
o preluúdo del β’welo,
’en tu kopa se β’iert en
‘uno a uno los s’έlos.

dezḟel pais oskuro
de los ombres ḋ’eniđo,
’a mirarte, de rodīlas
’ała, deznūđa,’unika.
poesía.

Lady of the winds,
heron of the plain,
whenever you sway,
your waist sings.

A gesture of the prayer,
or a prelude to the flight,
into you cup, one by one,
the heavens are poured.

From the dark country of men
I have come on my knees to see you.
Tall, naked, unique.

Poetry.

3. QUITO, ECUADOR [78° 35’ W]

*Palmera* (The palm, 1936)
by Jorge Carrera Andrade
(Ecuadorean poet, 1903-1978)

Más que árbol, arquitectura
a pulso de sol y viento,
la palmera es la columna
de ajimez del cielo.

mas ke ’arböl, ’arkitekturā
’a pulso de sol ’i βënto,
la palmera ’es la kolumnā
de ’ahimes del s’elo.

*More than a tree, it is architecture
at the pulse of sun and wind,
the palm is the column that supports
the arched window of the sky.*

4. HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT, UNITED STATES [72° 40’ W]

*Of mere being* (1954)
by Wallace Stevens
(American poet, 1879-1955)

The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze décor.

A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning,
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know then that it is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.
The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird’s fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

5. Amesbury, Massachusetts, United States [70° 56’ W]

from *The palm-tree* (1858)
by John Greenleaf Whittier
(American poet, 1807-1892)

Is it the palm, the cocoa-palm,
On the Indian Sea, by the isles of balm?
Or is it a ship in the breezeless calm?

A ship whose keel is of palm beneath,
Whose ribs of palm have a palm-bark sheath,
And a rudder of palm it steereth with.

Branches of palm are its spars and rails,
Fibres of palm are its woven sails,
And the rope is of palm that idly trails!
When the awaited hour comes
when I leave this beloved life,
leave a palm tree for me, 
planted on my grave.

Thus when all is quiet
and dissolved into oblivion,
her slender trunk will recover
the elegance of her waist.

And in her cup, whose height 
is doubled in melancholy,
her head will droop
with somber sweetness.

She will tenderly deliver the flower
to the sound of the wind,
with the same golden trail
that her own beauty left behind.

Like a passing sigh,
that flutters among the fronds,
she will murmur my heartache
to the twilight breeze.

And so my memory must be,
in its restlessness and anguish,
like a mysterious bird
that returns at nightfall.

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Soneto a una palma (Sonnet to a palm, 1956)
by Juana de Ibarbourou
(Uruguayan poet, 1892-1979)

Ya sin hambre ni sed, apenas alma,
Apenas cuerpo que se va durmiendo
Toda lúcida mente es como entiendo
La infinidad de Dios en esta palma.

Cuando todo se vuelva eterna calma
Y siga el mar la frágil tierra hundiendo
Poco a poco mi espíritu volviendo
Irá a buscar morada en esta palma.

Tal vez pequeño pájaro de canto
O humilde y tierno ramo de oxicanto
Con una flor azul junto a su planta,

Mi palma ya será mi patria eterna
Y ha de tener por siempre una lucerna
La luz de una amistad que siembra y canta.

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Buenos Aires, Argentina [58° 23' W]

La palmera (The palm, 1924)
by Leopoldo Lugones Argüello
(Argentine poet, 1874-1938)

Al llegar la hora esperada
en que de amarla me muera,
que dejen una palmera
sobre mi tumba plantada.

Así cuando todo calle,
en el olvido disuelto,
recobrará el tronco esbelto
la elegancia de su talle.

En la copa, que su alteza
doble con melancolía,
se abatirá la sombría
dulzura de su cabeza.

Entregará con ternura
la flor, al viento sonoro,
lo mismo reguero de oro
que dejaba su hermosura.

Como un suspiro al pasar,
palpitando entre las hojas,
murmurará mis congojas
que dejaba su hermosura.

And so my memory must be,
in its restlessness and anguish,
like a mysterious bird
that returns at nightfall.

Montevideo, Uruguay [56° 11' W]

Soneto a una palma (Sonnet to a palm, 1956)
by Leopoldo Lugones Argüello
(Argentine poet, 1874-1938)
At once beyond hunger or thirst,
Scarce a soul, barely a body, soon to sleep,
With an entirely lucid mind: this is how I understand
The infinity of God in this palm tree.

When everything becomes eternally calm,
And follows the sea as it cleaves the fragile earth,
Little by little, my spirit will return, it will go
To seek shelter in this palm.

Perhaps there will be a little songbird,
Or a humble, tender branch of hawthorn
With its blue flower beside this tree,
For my palm will be my eternal homeland,
And it will shine forever like a beacon
With the light of friendship that sows and sings.

8 RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL [43°12’ W]

A palmeira (The palm tree, 1957)
by Cecília Meireles
(Brazilian poet, 1901-1964)

Palmeira sem história,
anônima na mata
unida ao verde, a tantas
ramagens recostada
e a seu destino presa,
Quando te olho recordo
uma vila distante
de amarelo crepúsculo,
onde os pássaros vinham
pousar na minha mesa;
Quando te amo compreendo
que és a sombra daquela
perdida em tarde e névoa
e o amor que por ti sinto
é saudade e tristeza.

palmera sê istoria,
‘anonima na mata
‘unidau verdži,
’a tantas camažens ĉekostada
’i a sêu deʃtino presa,
kwando tʃjiamu
‘ekorduma vila distantʃi
dʒ’amarelu krepuskuł
’ondos pasaruz vinvau
puzar na min’ia meza;

9 DAKAR, SENEGAL [17°27’ W]

A Wolof proverb

Ba nga séenee ron,
ron a la jëkka séen.
ba nga sene ron,
ron a la dʒ’akka sen.

“Whenever you see the palm tree,
it has already seen you.”

10 PORTO, PORTUGAL [8°37’ W]

As palmeiras (The palms, 1994)
by Eugénio de Andrade (born José Fontinhas)
(Portuguese poet, 1923-2005)

Também o deserto vem
do mar. Não sei em que navio,
mas foi desses lugares
que chegaram ao meu jardim
as palmeiras.
Com o sol das areias
em cada folha,
na coroa o sopro
ainda húmido das estrelas.
tambai u dizertu vai
du mar. nau saia ‘in ki naivi
mʃ fo’ deiʃt luagarti
k1 jigaroc ao miu ʒardii
’ʃ palmaʃʃi,j.
koʃ u sol dez araʃʃi
’en keda foli
na kuroi ’u sopru
’aind ʃ umidu dez estrelʃ.”
Also the desert comes from the sea. Upon which ship I do not know, but it was from such a place that they arrived in my garden: the palm trees. With the sun of the sands on every leafy frond, and within its crown the still moist breath of the stars.

11 Córdoba, Spain [4° 44’ W]

**The palm of Ruṣafa, 756**

by Abd ar-Rahman ibn Mu’awiya ibn Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik

(Syrian poet and soldier, Emir of Córdoba, 731-788)

The lonely palm appeared to us in the middle of Raṣafa, While we were in the West, far from the land of palms. I said to the tree: “You are in the remotest exile, like I am, So far from my son and my family for such a long time. Like me, you sprang up and grew in a foreign land, And like you, I have been excluded and estranged. May the rain from the early morning clouds nourish you, And may copious waters pour down and comfort you.”

12 Edinburgh, Scotland [3° 11’ W]

from *The Hawaiian archipelago: Six months among the palm groves, coral reefs, and volcanoes of the Sandwich Islands* (1875)

by Isabella Bird

(Scottish explorer, 1831-1904)

“As I write now, I hear the moaning rustle of the wind through their plume-like tops, and their long slender stems, and crisp crown of leaves above the trees with shining leafage which revel in damp... They fringe the shores of these islands. Wherever it is dry and fiercely hot, and the lava is black and hard, and nothing else grows, or can grow, there they are, close to the sea, sending their root-fibres seawards as if in search of salt water.

Their long, curved, wrinkled, perfectly cylindrical stems, bulging near the ground like an apothecary’s pestle, rise to a height of from sixty to one hundred feet. These stems are never straight, and in a grove, lean and curve every way. They look as if they had never been young, and they show no signs of growth, rearing their plummy tufts so far aloft, and casting their shadows so far away, always supremely lonely, as though they belonged to the heavens, rather than the earth.”

13 Oxford, England [1° 15’ W]

**Abruptly all the palm trees** (1950)

by William Jay Smith

(American poet, 1918-2015)

Abruptly all the palm trees rose like parasols, And sunlight danced, and green to greenness gave. Birds flew forth and cast like waterfalls Shadow upon shade. Where the crab with its linoleum colors crawls, And coral combs the crystal-caverned sea, We stood, our blood as bright and fringed as shawls Before the beautiful, progressing leaf. Abruptly all the palm trees rose like parasols, And green was the green which green to greenness gave. Dimensions crumbled, time lay down its walls, And all the world went wading towards the wave.

14 Accra, Ghana [0° 12’ W]

**An Oji proverb**

“Biribi ñko ka empopã, enye krada.”

15 Kent, England [0° 73’ E]

from *Arcadia* (adapted, 1585)

by Sir Philip Sidney

(English poet, courtier, soldier, and scholar, 1554-1586)

“For it is the temper of the highest heart, to strive most upward when it is most burdened, like the palm-tree.”
Beside a wall of sweltering stones.
Under a blanket of ice and snow.
That suffers in silent sorrow
Encased in white, it slumbers
In a distant Eastern land,
At a barren northern height;
(Anglo-French poet, 1906-1962)
by Jean Amrouche

A single pine tree stands alone
At a barren northern height;
Encased in white, it slumbers
Under a blanket of ice and snow.
It dreams of a single palm tree
In a distant Eastern land,
That suffers in silent sorrow
Beside a wall of sweltering stones.

"Il n’y a pas de raccourcis vers le haut du palmier."
"There are no shortcuts to the top of the palm tree."

Les palmes dans la nuit versent de lourdes larmes.
Leurs ombres sur la mer s’inclinent,
à peine bruisent
comme pleurant les âmes éparses
en l’immobilité sereine des étoiles.

Pour qui le frémissement de vos mains retombées
et votre sourd sanglot dans le vertige de la nuit?

A Cameroonian proverb

"There are no shortcuts to the top of the palm tree."

A single pine tree stands alone
At a barren northern height;
Encased in white, it slumbers
Under a blanket of ice and snow.
It dreams of a single palm tree
In a distant Eastern land,
That suffers in silent sorrow
Beside a wall of sweltering stones.

Palmes,
pour qui l’appel des mers lointaines,
les parfums chauds, l’angoisse,
qui reposent dans l’or de vos coeurs entr’ouverts,
au froid baiser de la lune?

Viendra-t-il, l’enfant nu, à l’œil immense,
etendre son désir le long de vos silences,
et par le ciel sans nom
l’amour inespéré va-t-il naître,
puis s’élancer dans le plein des étoiles?

O palmes,
le manteau frissonnant de vos cheveux bleus
et l’ombre de vos corps qui se balancent
ont chanté tout le jour
les soleils délirants des rives éblouies.

L’heure où le grand sommeil
courbera nos lourdes nudités vers la terre
a sonné, loin, dans les plaines du songe.

Nous portons sur le front le sombre diadème
et nos coeurs alourdis par l’impossible amour
adorent dans la nuit et la musique des étoiles
la blessure que vos feuilles amies endorment,
et le sanglot sans fin de vos branches tombées.

The pine tree and the palm, 1827

There are no shortcuts to the top of the palm tree.

A Cameroonian proverb

"There are no shortcuts to the top of the palm tree."

A single pine tree stands alone
At a barren northern height;
Encased in white, it slumbers
Under a blanket of ice and snow.
It dreams of a single palm tree
In a distant Eastern land,
That suffers in silent sorrow
Beside a wall of sweltering stones.

Palmes,
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puis s’élancer dans le plein des étoiles?

O palmes,
le manteau frissonnant de vos cheveux bleus
et l’ombre de vos corps qui se balancent
ont chanté tout le jour
les soleils délirants des rives éblouies.

L’heure où le grand sommeil
courbera nos lourdes nudités vers la terre
a sonné, loin, dans les plaines du songe.

Nous portons sur le front le sombre diadème
et nos coeurs alourdis par l’impossible amour
adorent dans la nuit et la musique des étoiles
la blessure que vos feuilles amies endorment,
et le sanglot sans fin de vos branches tombées.

The pine tree and the palm, 1827

There are no shortcuts to the top of the palm tree.

A Cameroonian proverb

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At a barren northern height;
Encased in white, it slumbers
Under a blanket of ice and snow.
It dreams of a single palm tree
In a distant Eastern land,
That suffers in silent sorrow
Beside a wall of sweltering stones.

Palmes,
pour qui l’appel des mers lointaines,
les parfums chauds, l’angoisse,
qui reposent dans l’or de vos coeurs entr’ouverts,
au froid baiser de la lune?

Viendra-t-il, l’enfant nu, à l’œil immense,
etendre son désir le long de vos silences,
et par le ciel sans nom
l’amour inespéré va-t-il naître,
puis s’élancer dans le plein des étoiles?

O palmes,
le manteau frissonnant de vos cheveux bleus
et l’ombre de vos corps qui se balancent
ont chanté tout le jour
les soleils délirants des rives éblouies.

L’heure où le grand sommeil
courbera nos lourdes nudités vers la terre
a sonné, loin, dans les plaines du songe.

Nous portons sur le front le sombre diadème
et nos coeurs alourdis par l’impossible amour
adorent dans la nuit et la musique des étoiles
la blessure que vos feuilles amies endorment,
et le sanglot sans fin de vos branches tombées.

The pine tree and the palm, 1827

There are no shortcuts to the top of the palm tree.

A Cameroonian proverb

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Encased in white, it slumbers
Under a blanket of ice and snow.
It dreams of a single palm tree
In a distant Eastern land,
That suffers in silent sorrow
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Palmes,
pour qui l’appel des mers lointaines,
les parfums chauds, l’angoisse,
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etendre son désir le long de vos silences,
et par le ciel sans nom
l’amour inespéré va-t-il naître,
puis s’élancer dans le plein des étoiles?

O palmes,
le manteau frissonnant de vos cheveux bleus
et l’ombre de vos corps qui se balancent
ont chanté tout le jour
les soleils délirants des rives éblouies.

L’heure où le grand sommeil
courbera nos lourdes nudités vers la terre
a sonné, loin, dans les plaines du songe.

Nous portons sur le front le sombre diadème
et nos coeurs alourdis par l’impossible amour
adorent dans la nuit et la musique des étoiles
la blessure que vos feuilles amies endorment,
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The pine tree and the palm, 1827

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A Cameroonian proverb

"There are no shortcuts to the top of the palm tree."

A single pine tree stands alone
At a barren northern height;
Encased in white, it slumbers
Under a blanket of ice and snow.
It dreams of a single palm tree
In a distant Eastern land,
That suffers in silent sorrow
Beside a wall of sweltering stones.
At night the palms shed heavy tears.
Their silhouettes bend toward the sea,
and they barely rustle,
like scattered souls that weep
under the serene stillness of the stars.

Palms,
for whom is the tremor of your lowered hands
and your muted sobs in the unsteady night?

Palms,
for whom is the call of the distant seas,
the warm scents, the anguish,
that rest in the gold of your half-open hearts,
under the cold kiss of the moon?

Will he come, the naked child, with the enormous eye,
to spread his desire alongside your silences,
and in this nameless sky
will an unexpected love be born,
and then rush upward into the sky full of stars?

O palms,
the shivering coat of your bluish hair
and the shadow of your swaying bodies
have sung every day of delirious suns on dazzling shores.

The hour has come, when a noble sleep
will bend our own naked heaviness toward the earth,
and then far away, into the plains of the dream.

On our brows we wear this somber crown,
and our hearts are heavy with impossible love,
as we cherish, on this night of music from the stars,
that our wounds are assuaged by your beloved branches,
and by the ceaseless sobs of your fallen fronds.

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While the foggy autumn
and the snowy winter
lay damp and cold across the north,
on the spring-like coast
under the shady palm
the swan builds its nest and home.

There is freshness and life
in nature’s abundance,
with no shroud of wintry attire;
behind the billowing reeds
like a sheltering wall, it finds
a haven from the breezes that blow.

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If you cut down the palm, it will grow back again.
Once upon a time
In a garden across the way
A solitary palm tree
Gazed at the stars
Endlessly

An Egyptian proverb

“It is good to speak the truth,
But it is better to speak about palm trees.”

An Amharic proverb

“You may mock the palm tree,
but only after the date harvest is finished.”

A Bedouin proverb

“He has the height of a palm tree,
but the mind of a baby goat.”

A Swahili proverb

“Don’t argue with the palm climber:
The coconut has already been eaten by the moon.”

Na səvəri diкam stаіt’ ad инoka
na golа’ viгfя’i ni sasна,
i’ driə’mliгt, katfя’i’as, i’ snιgəm sιpуtɨ’m
’adі’тa, kak rіzɬ, аnа.
i’ snɨ’tsɬ ɬi ʃsі ʃto fpuстiні dəlоkɬі
fтомkra’il’g’dе sɔntѕ vаsχot,
’adnа ’i’ гrusnа ɬа’ ʊ’tо’ʃi ɡa’rі’тjɪ’m,
priɡ’rəsна’ɬа’ pəl’mа rаst’ɬt.

In the northern wilderness, a pine tree
Stands alone on a bare mountain top,
While she slumbers and sways, the snow
Drapes over her, like rhinestones.

She dreams of all in the desert faraway,
In that place where the sun is now rising,
While lonely and sad on a sweltering cliff,
A beautiful palm tree grows.

“I am content to feel the sting
of the thorns on your palm tree,
And I will trust you, ungrateful one,
if I may also taste its sweet date fruit.”
A Pashto proverb

Don’t show me the palm tree; show me the dates.

The palm tree stands on a single stem, and is loftier than any other tree, as it peers into the vault of the sky.

It longs to pierce the dark ceiling of storm clouds and take flight - if only the tree had wings!

The palm expresses this desire by tossing its tresses in the wind and allowing its branches to swish and sway, 

It thinks: “If my fronds were feathers, then nothing would keep me from rising off the ground.”

For the whole day, the wind-blown palm rustles and trembles, quivers and shakes, as though it thinks it can fly -

It imagines soaring through the heavens, wandering to the outermost reaches, stretching up to the region of the stars.

But as soon as the wind begins to subside, the leafy palm fronds grow quiet and still, and the awareness of the tree returns -

The palm then remembers its mother, the earth, and appreciates once more its own sweet corner of the world.

As I write, I am in a small building made of thatched coconut-palm leaves. It is early morning and I’m sitting by the window, looking out at the rice fields that are brushed by the rising sun.
As the exotic scent lingered in the air.

Adapted from an article in Vice News

The breeze was so refreshing as I leisurely walked home.

By the time I reached the village bridge, the full moon was peeking out over the coconut trees along the river.”

*32* XINGYANG, HENAN PROVINCE, CHINA [113° 21' E]

题僧房双桐 (ti sān fāng jǐwǔ tóng),

At the room of two monks, 750

by Chānglíng Wáng (王昌龄)

(Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty, 698-756)

棕榈花满院。

苔藓入闲房。

彼此名言绝，

空中闻异香。

dzon ly hwa man yen
tai pien ti pien fan
bi tsǐ miŋ ien d3e
kong dzon yen i siwān

The palm flowers blossomed in the garden, And the moss crept into the empty room; Here, their souls were struck with silence, As the exotic scent lingered in the air.

*33* KALIMANTAN, BORNEO, INDONESIA [114° 00' E]

from Indonesia is killing the planet for palm oil (2014)
adapted from an article in Vice News

by Samuel Oakford

“Indonesia is being deforested faster than any other country in the world, and it has everything to do with one product: palm oil.

Though illegal, huge swaths of the Indonesian rainforest have been slashed and burned each year to clear the way for expanding palm oil plantations.

This tree-killing spree has taken a heavy toll on local communities, destroyed natural habitats for endangered species, and become a critical factor in climate change.

For people living in these areas, the loss of wildlife is a reflection of their own plight.

Collusion between corrupt government officials and plantation owners has increased illegal land seizures, and effectively transformed residents overnight – from subsistence farmers to forced and child laborers.

These fires have produced some of the world’s worst pollution, sending suffocating smog to cities hundreds of miles away.”

34 MANILA, THE PHILIPPINES [121° 00' E]

from The scent of dried anahaw leaves (2017)

by Patrick De Guia Lim

(Filipino poet and choral singer, b 1984)

Ang matamis na halimuayak na dumadaloy mula sa mga tuyo dahon ng anahaw na nasisisilbing bubong sa mga munting barang-barong ay nagpapaalala sa kagandahan ng pagtandang mas humahalimuayak nang matamis sa paglipas ng panahon.

Ang samyo ng bango ay unti-unting dumarating at ako ay ibinalak ng aking mga alaala noong panahong una nang ako ay munting musmos pa.

Dapat ko bang ipagpatuloy ang tulang ito? Ang kampana ay tumutunog na ...

Ang halimuayak ng mga tuyo dahon ng anahaw ay saki'y nagpapahiwatiw na mas lumawak na ang aking kaalaman ngayong ako'y tumanda na.

'āŋ matamis na halimu/ak na dumadalol mula sa maŋa tūŋ hahon nāŋ 'anahau na nasisisilbing bubon sa maŋa munting barong-barong 'āl nagpapa'alala sa kagandahan nāŋ paagtandang mas humahalimu/ak nāŋ matamis sa paglipas nāŋ panahon.

'āŋ sam/o nāŋ bān'o 'āl 'ulti-ultiñum dumaratñ 'at 'ako 'āl 'ibinabalik nāŋ 'ākiŋ maŋa 'ala'ala no'oñ panahon 'una nāŋ 'ako 'āl munting musmos pa.

dapat ko baŋ 'ipagpatulų 'āŋ tulaŋ 'ito? 'āŋ kampana 'āl tumutunüng na...

'āŋ halimu/ak nāŋ maŋa tūň hahon nāŋ 'anahau 'āl saki nagpapahiwatiw na nas lumawak na 'āŋ 'ākiŋ ka'alaman nā'oŋ 'ako' tumanda na

The sweet scent that flows from the leaves of the dried anahaw that serves as the roof of small huts reveals the preciousness of age when it grows older and brittle.

As it comes drifting to my nose, I am thrown back to years ago when I was but a little child.
Should I continue this poem?  
The bells are ringing anyway...

The scent of dried anahaw leaves  
gives me the feeling of knowing more  
now that I am older.

35  
TOKYO, JAPAN [139° 21' E]  

from 椰子の実 (Yashi no mi, The coconut, 1901)  
by Shimazaki Tōson (島崎藤村)  
(Japanese poet, 1872-1943)

名も知らぬ遠き島より  
流れ寄る椰子の実ひとつ  
故郷の岸を離れて  
汝はそも波に幾月  
旧の樹は生ひや茂れる  
枝はなお影をやなせる  
われもまた渚を枕  
ひとり身の浮寝の旅ぞ

From an unknown island far away,  
A solitary coconut drifts to the shore,  
Far from the shores of its home.  
For how long have you been wandering?  
Your mother tree still rustles in the breeze,  
And offers her strong branches for shade.  
I am also in exile; the beach is my bed too,  
On this lonely journey upon the waves.

36  
MAUI, HAWAI'I, UNITED STATES [156° 20' W]  
The palms (1994)  
by WS (William Stanley) Merwin  
(American poet and environmentalist, b 1927)

Each is alone in the world  
and on some the flowers are of one sex only  
they stand as though they had no secrets  
and one by one  
the flowers emerge  
from the sheaths into the air  
where the other flowers are  
it happens in silence  
extcept for the wind  
often it happens in the dark  
with the earth carrying the sound of water  
most of the flowers themselves  
are small and green by day  
and only a few are fragrant  
but in time the fruits are beautiful  
and later still their children  
whether they are seen or not  
many of the fruits are no larger than peas  
but some are like brains of black marble  
and some have more than one seed inside them  
some are full of milk  
of one taste or another  
and on a number of them  
there is a writing from long before speech  
and the children resemble each other  
with the same family preference  
for shade when young  
in which their colors deepen  
and the same family liking  
for water and warmth  
and each family deals with the wind  
in its own way  
and with the sun  
and the water  
some of the leaves are crystals  
others are stars  
some are bows  
some are bridges  
and some are hands  
in a world without hands  
they know of each other first from themselves  
some are fond of limestone  
and a few cling to high cliffs  
they learn from the splashing water  
and the falling water  
and the wind  
much later  
the elephant will learn from them  
the muscles will learn from their shadows  
ears will begin to hear in them  
the sound of water  
and heads will float like black nutshells  
on an unmeasured ocean  
either rising nor falling  
to be held up at last  
and named for the sea

37  
PAPE'ETE, TAHITI, FRENCH POLYNESIA [149° 34' W]  

A Tahitian proverb  
Tupu a’au, mātʻa niu, ʻāre’a reva taʻata.  
tupu ʻa’au, moti’a niu, ʻore’a reva taʻata.  

“The coral waxes,  
the palm tree grows,  
but man departs.”
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